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PREVIEW ROBOCOP: ROGUE CITY



ISSUE 94 SUMMER 2023

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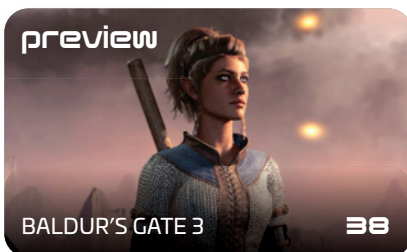
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FROM THE EDITORS



TOUCH GRASS

This issue's cover game, *Pikmin 4*, reminded us of one of the neatest—and perhaps most counterintuitive—benefits of modern video games: They're a great way to appreciate nature.

Games can't put you inside of *real* nature, of course. The great outdoors are, well, outdoors, and while you can absolutely play your Nintendo Switch while hiking, you're probably not going to get the most out of either activity that way.

But the virtual depictions of nature in games are quite sophisticated these days, enough so that they manage to capture some of the majesty of actually being out in the unspoiled wilderness. Think of the sun-dappled prairies of *Red Dead Redemption II*, or the cloud-draped mountains of *Horizon: Forbidden West*. Even more fantastical games like *Halo* and *Skyrim* still look to replicate the same sense of awe we feel when we're out in the wild by drawing inspiration from plants and landscapes on Earth.

Even if the vistas you see in games don't inspire you to get out into nature yourself, they can hopefully help you appreciate why some people do love to spend time in the undeveloped spaces of our world.

And as our cover game beautifully illustrates, you don't need an expensive trip or

a long hike to connect with nature, either. *Pikmin 4*, Nintendo's distinctive take on the real-time strategy genre that puts you in command of a squad of tiny, plant-like creatures, is set in the small pockets of nature that might be just outside your door right now, waiting for you to take a closer look. *Pikmin* creator Shigeru Miyamoto has said he was inspired by watching ants in his garden.

If the outdoors aren't your thing, though, don't worry. There's plenty to keep you occupied inside, too, as you'll read about in this issue. As always, you can check out our Five to Play section for games you can pick up today or very soon, and we've got reviews of *Star Wars Jedi: Survivor* and *Advance Wars 1+2: Re-Boot Camp*. We're also bringing you previews of *RoboCop: Rogue City*, *Baldur's Gate III*, and *Atlas Fallen*, titles you can look forward to playing a little later in the year.

Whether games have inspired you to pack a rucksack and hit the trail, or you instead plan to spend the summer in air-conditioned comfort, be sure to keep reading *Walmart Gamecenter*, the magazine that keeps you at the center of all things gaming.

Josh Harmon and Mollie L Patterson

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Gamecenter
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TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: THE LAST RONIN GAME IN THE WORKS

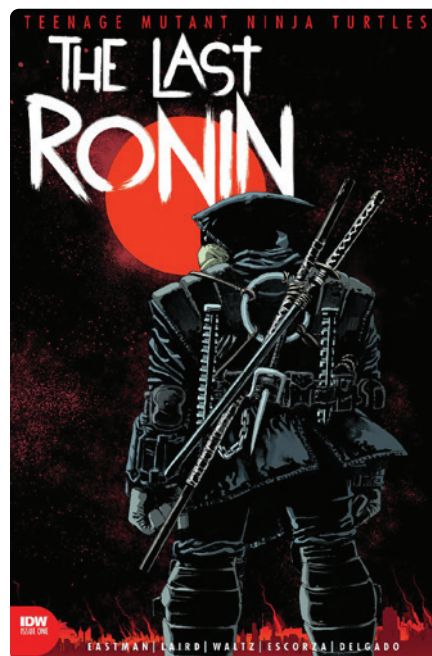
The Heroes in a Half-Shell are getting a high-end, story-driven action game. Well, at least one of them is.

In a interview with gaming news site Polygon, Paramount Global senior vice president for games and emerging media Doug Rosen revealed that the company is partnering with an unnamed development

studio to adapt the graphic novel miniseries *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: The Last Ronin* into a big-budget third-person action RPG. Rosen likened the project to Sony's 2019 *God of War*, a comparison that makes it clear Paramount has big ambitions for the title.

The Last Ronin ran for five issues from 2020 to 2022, putting a gritty, dystopian spin on the established world and characters of the *Ninja Turtles*. The story takes place in a future version of New York where the Foot Clan—led by Oroku Saki, grandson of the original Shredder—has conquered the city and rules with an iron fist. All of the Turtles we know and love are dead, save one. This lone survivor, who fights with all of the Turtles' weapons and whose identity remains a mystery for most of the story, sets out on a quest to avenge his fallen brothers.

While it may be surprising to hear that a darker, less well-known *TMNT* tale is getting the triple-A treatment, the tone and storyline should also make *The Last Ronin* much more natural to adapt into a game. We've gotten no shortage of *Turtles* games over the past 30 years, but given the brand's focus on four different heroes, multiplayer games—like the beloved series



of 1990s arcade beat 'em ups—have been the norm. Even single-player games have emphasized being able to select a Turtle to play as, making it more of a challenge to elevate storytelling. With *The Last Ronin*, the game can focus on a singular hero while still staying true to the source material.

According to Rosen, *The Last Ronin* game remains “a few years off.” Paramount has not announced which consoles the still-unnamed developer will target for release.

In the meantime, you can pick up current *Ninja Turtles* games, merchandise, and other media—including issues of *The Last Ronin*—at Walmart.com or your local Walmart store.



500 Million

Number of PlayStation home consoles sold by Sony, the first console manufacturer to hit that number

1.8 Million

Counter-Strike: Global Offensive's highest-ever concurrent players—a milestone it reached in May 2023, 11 years after release

\$1 Billion+

Global box office gross of *The Super Mario Bros. Movie*, only the 10th animated film to pass that mark

\$770 million

Amount paid by Sega to acquire *Angry Birds* maker Rovio

4

New characters coming to the *Street Fighter 6* roster in the first year after launch

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Walmart* release calendar

JUN

27 **STORY OF SEASONS: A WONDERFUL LIFE**
XSEED / XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, SWITCH, PC

30 **MASTER DETECTIVE ARCHIVES: RAIN CODE**
SPIKE CHUNSOFT / SWITCH

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7 **THE LEGEND OF HEROES: TRAILS INTO REVERIE**
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6 **STARFIELD**
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8 **ANONYMOUS;CODE**
SPIKE CHUNSOFT / SWITCH, PS4, PC

ATARI ACQUIRES MORE RETRO CLASSICS



It wasn't so long ago that the company currently known as Atari was in the news mostly for plans for gaming-themed hotels, cryptocurrency ambitions, and hats with built-in speakers.

In recent years, however, there's been a real change at the company. Atari's roster of *Recharged* remakes have been genuinely great, and many have hailed the recent *Atari 50: The Anniversary Celebration* as one of the best retro collections ever.

Now, with a number of recent acquisitions, the company doesn't look to be slowing down in its pursuit of bringing back beloved games from the past. In April, Atari acquired the rights to more than 100 PC and console titles from old-

school publishers and developers such as Accolade, Infogrames, and Microprose. The list includes *1942: Pacific Air War*, the *F-14* and *Demolition Racer* franchises, and the works of a certain platforming bobcat by the name of Bubsy.

Then, in May, Atari also picked up the rights to more than a dozen classic Atari 2600 games originally published under the M Network label, which existed as a video game division within Mattel back in the '80s. Although that name may mean nothing to our younger readers, those around during the days of the Atari 2600 will no doubt remember titles such as *Armor Ambush*, *Astroblast*, *Frogs and Flies*, *Space Attack*, and *Star Strike*.

While we wait to see what Atari has planned for these new acquisitions, be sure to check out *Atari 50: The Anniversary Celebration*, and the other Atari-themed releases on offer every day at your local Walmart store or on Walmart.com.

METAL GEAR SOLID Δ: SNAKE EATER TO REVIVE A STEALTH CLASSIC ON NEW CONSOLES

Konami has announced a long-anticipated remake of the stealth action classic *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*, updating the graphics and gameplay for PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X/S, and PC.

Called *Metal Gear Solid Δ: Snake Eater*—that triangle is pronounced “delta,” if you’re not up on your Greek—the new game represents a ground-up remake of the 2004 PlayStation 2 original, more in the vein of Capcom’s recent *Resident Evil* remakes than a traditional remaster.

In a message accompanying the announcement, the development team

promised “a faithful recreation of the original story and game design, while evolving the gameplay with stunning visuals and a seamless user experience.” Konami also confirmed it will bring back the entire original voice cast to reprise their roles for the remake.

Metal Gear Solid 3 served as a prequel for the series, following a younger version of the series’ villain, Big Boss, as he embarked on a mission into a Soviet-controlled jungle in 1964. The game blended the franchise’s traditional stealth action gameplay with survival elements, and it’s earned a reputation as one of the best *Metal Gear Solid* titles.

As of yet, there’s no word on when we can expect *Metal Gear Solid Δ* to launch. In the meantime, you can catch up on the series by picking up the latest *Metal Gear Solid* games from Walmart.com or your local Walmart store.



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MONKEY AROUND WITH LEGO'S NEW DONKEY KONG SETS

LEGO's line of *Super Mario*-themed sets has been a hit with kids of all ages, offering the chance to recreate a long list of classic characters and locations from across the franchise's history with the beloved building blocks. This summer, yet another familiar face is swinging in to join the party.



In August, four new sets focused on Mario's nemesis-turned-friend Donkey Kong will join the lineup. First up is Donkey Kong's Tree House, a 555-piece set that features DK and Cranky Kong hanging out in their jungle hideaway. Diddy Kong's Mine Cart Ride, meanwhile, comes with 1,157 pieces with which to build a trademark *Donkey Kong Country* mine cart track, complete with Diddy Kong and everyone's favorite surfer simian Funky Kong.

Those bigger sets come along with two smaller expansion options: the 174-piece Dixie Kong's Jungle Jam, and the 106-piece Rambi the Rhino set.

To snag your own *Donkey Kong* LEGO sets, or to check out the full line of *Super Mario* LEGO products, head over to [Walmart.com](https://www.walmart.com) or your local Walmart store.

THE STRONG GETS MAJOR EXPANSION TO GAMING EXHIBITS

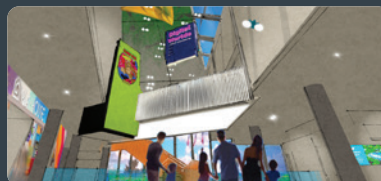


The Strong National Museum of Play, the only collections-based museum devoted to the history and exploration of play, has just undergone a major expansion—and a sizable chunk of the added space is devoted to electronic gaming.

Of the expansion's 90,000 square feet of exhibition space, over 24,000 focus on "the celebration of electronic games." According to museum staff, the new space houses exhibits such as *ESL Digital Worlds*, which "offers two progressive, video game-centric areas—*Level Up* and *High Score*—where visitors can create their own personalized avatars and embark on challenging and puzzle-solving quests."

Guests can also learn more about the business and art sides of the video game industry, delve deeper into the stories behind the World Video Game Hall of Fame and Women in Games exhibit, and check out the museum's other pre-existing, permanent gaming-focused exhibits, which include *Pinball Playfields*, the *Raceway Arcade*, and *eGameRevolution*.

"The Strong is putting Rochester, NY, back on the map as a top destination for family fun and for gamers of all ages," said Steve Dubnik, president & CEO of The Strong. "We can't wait for guests to experience the magic of play even more and immerse themselves in our new exhibits."



GAMING MOVIE/TV

LIGHTNING ROUND

Video game adaptations might just be the biggest trend in Hollywood these days. We just updated you on quite a few big projects in our last issue, but since then, there have been so many new announcements that we can hardly find space to fit them all.

Here's a rapid-fire rundown of the biggest news:

- The long-in-development *Minecraft* movie now has a release date: **April 4th, 2025**. The film will star Jason Momoa, with *Napoleon Dynamite*'s Jared Hess directing.

- Also dated is the big-screen adaptation of *Five Nights at Freddy's*, the horror series about Chuck E. Cheese—style animatronics gone evil. That's due out **October 27th, 2023**—just in time for Halloween. Matthew Lillard (*Scream*, *Scooby-Doo*) and Josh Hutcherson (*The Hunger Games*) star.

- Legendary Entertainment has struck a deal with Capcom to co-produce a fresh movie adaptation of *Street Fighter*. The project is still in its earliest stages, but Legendary has a bit of experience adapting games, having previously worked with Nintendo on *Detective Pikachu*.

- Streaming service Paramount+ is working on a live-action TV spin-off of the *Sonic the Hedgehog* films centered on Idris Elba's Knuckles.

- Karl Urban (*The Boys*, *Dredd*) will play Johnny Cage in a sequel to 2021's live-action *Mortal Kombat* movie.

- Hot off the success of *The Super Mario Bros. Movie*, Nintendo is looking at what other characters it could bring to the big screen, creator Shigeru Miyamoto recently told Japanese newspaper Nikkei.

Whew!



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MINECRAFT LEGENDS DELUXE EDITION



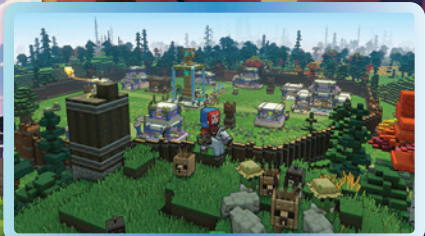
Uncover an Epic Legend

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Fantasy Violence

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Nintendo Switch Lite plays all games that support handheld mode.
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FINAL FANTASY XVI

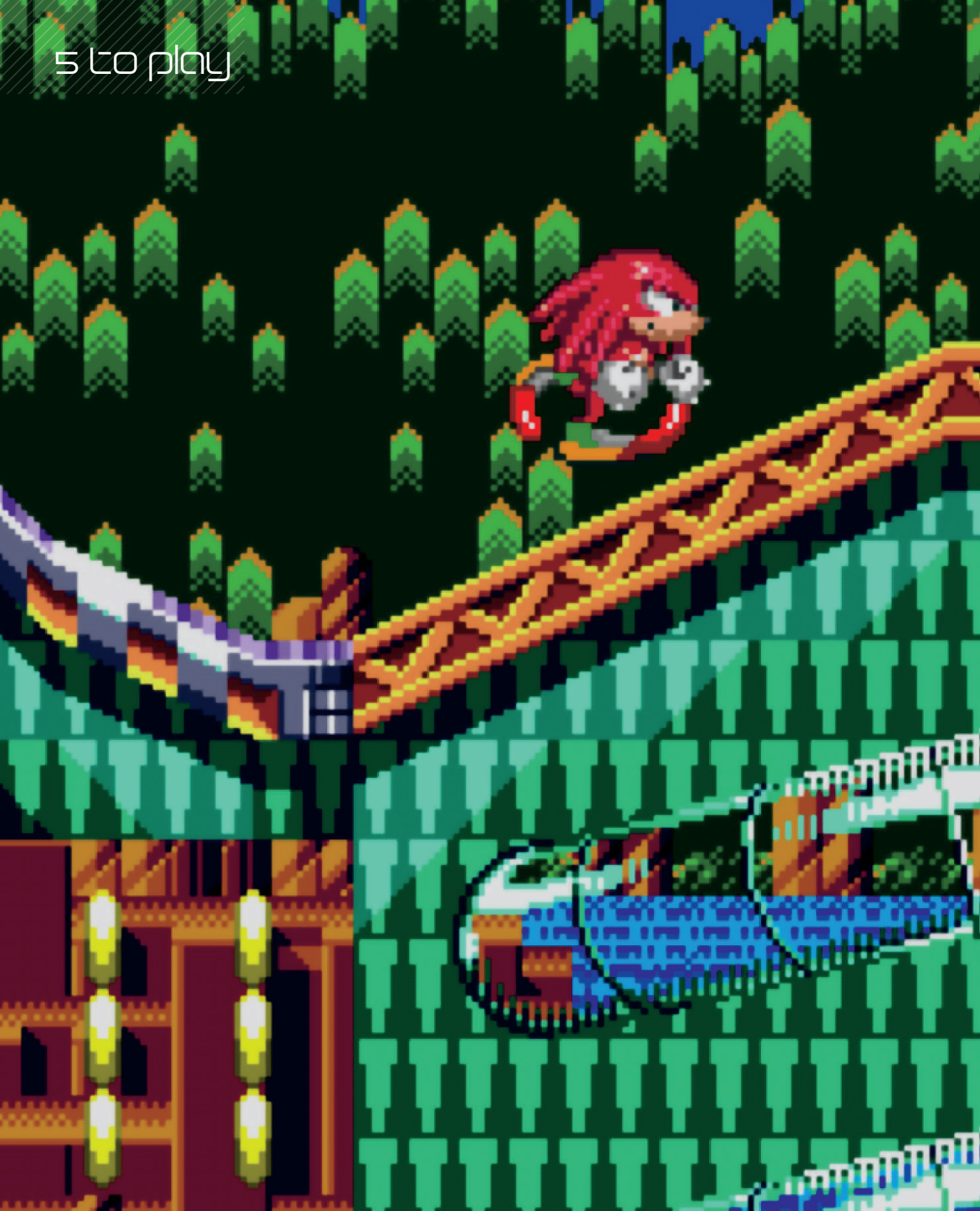
PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX / DEVELOPER SQUARE ENIX / PLATFORMS PS5 / RELEASE DATE 06.22.2023

"*Final Fantasy XVI* is set in a *Game of Thrones*–like realm called Valisthea, 1,500 years after the downfall of The Fallen, a civilization that discovered the secret of channeling naturally occurring aether into magic, and [then] used that power to usher in an age of unparalleled advancement. Nowadays, however, nations struggle for control of dwindling resources. For the gameplay, we took two of the key elements that define this series as our starting point: a compelling storyline and awe-inspiring beasts, known as Eikons. We also built a new, fully fledged action battle system, one that was inspired by *Final Fantasy V* and *God of War*. I know a lot of players love the classic, turn-based system, but we felt switching over to a highly interactive and responsive action system was the best choice. This is especially true for the epic Eikon battles, where the player gets to experience what it's like to control their very own Eikon."

HIROSHI TAKAI, MAIN DIRECTOR, SQUARE ENIX

"I know a lot of players love the classic, turn-based system, but we felt switching over to a highly interactive and responsive action system was the best choice."

5 to play



2

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SONIC ORIGINS PLUS

PUBLISHER SEGA / DEVELOPER SONIC TEAM / PLATFORMS XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, SWITCH, XBOX ONE, PS4, PC / RELEASE DATE 06.23.2023

"*Sonic Origins Plus* is the definitive way to play the classic *Sonic* games *Sonic the Hedgehog 1*, *Sonic the Hedgehog 2*, *Sonic 3 & Knuckles*, and *Sonic CD*. They're now playable in widescreen HD, and include new challenge modes, opening and closing animated shorts, and a variety of behind-the-scenes content in the museum. You can even, for the first time, play as Amy in *Sonic 1*, *Sonic 2*, *Sonic 3*, and *Sonic CD*, or play as Knuckles in *Sonic CD*. *Plus* also adds 12 *Sonic* Game Gear titles, which have been emulated for current-generation consoles and PC, and even keeps multiplayer features intact for such games as *Dr. Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine* and *Sonic Drift 2*. The physical version of *Plus* also includes a 20-page artbook of classic *Sonic the Hedgehog* art and a reversible cover sheet with never-before-seen graphics that pay homage to the classic '90s era when the franchise began."

"*Sonic Origins Plus* is the definitive way to play the classic *Sonic* games *Sonic the Hedgehog 1*, *Sonic the Hedgehog 2*, *Sonic 3 & Knuckles*, and *Sonic CD*."

TAKASHI IIZUKA, EXECUTIVE OFFICER AND SONIC CREATIVE OFFICER, SEGA OF AMERICA INC.

5 to play



PREORDER

EXOPRIMAL

PUBLISHER CAPCOM / DEVELOPER CAPCOM / PLATFORMS XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, XBOX ONE, PS4, PC / RELEASE DATE 07.14.2023

“*Exoprimal* is an exhilarating multiplayer game—think *Team Fortress 2* and *Left 4 Dead* — where players equip state-of-the-art powered armor called exosuits, and take on specific roles in battle against massive hordes of unrelenting dinosaurs. In its main mode, Dino Survival, teams of five go head-to-head with a rival squad of players in a race to complete a variety of objectives. Missions are selected based on participants’ in-game progression, so players can have widely varying experiences even while taking on the same missions in the same stage. For example, players may encounter larger dinosaurs in one match and then face an unending onslaught of smaller dinosaurs in the next, even when assigned the same mission. *Exoprimal* will also include missions where players enter direct combat against other exofighters, as well as a mode where squads of five players can take on various challenges in weekly rotating high-difficulty missions.”

TAKURO HIRAOKA, DIRECTOR, CAPCOM

“[P]layers may encounter larger dinosaurs in one match and then face an unending onslaught of smaller dinosaurs in the next, even when assigned the same mission.”

ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE

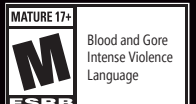
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*Diablo® III items available on Xbox One; Diablo III sold separately. Amalgam of Rage Mount available on PC for World of Warcraft®; World of Warcraft sold separately. Umber Winged Darkness Cosmetics Set available on mobile for Diablo® Immortal; Diablo Immortal available separately. All downloaded separately. Battle.net account required. Mount access must be unlocked in-game before using mounts.

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PARK BEYOND

PUBLISHER BANDAI NAMCO / **DEVELOPER** LIMBIC ENTERTAINMENT / **PLATFORMS** XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, PC / **RELEASE DATE** 06.15.2023

Park Beyond is not the first video game that lets you design, build, and run your own amusement park, and it won't be the last. But what sets it apart is that, unlike more realistic theme park simulations, *Park Beyond* isn't always bound by the rules of gravity or physics. That means you can build physically impossible roller coasters and thrill rides, like a cannon that shoots a roller coaster cart across the park and onto a waiting track, while enjoying snacks that violate safety regulations, such as sandwiches made by a samurai-sword-wielding chef. You'll even be able to skirt copyright laws with add-ons like the "Pac-Man Impossification Set," which includes rides, stories, and decorative items that celebrate the iconic video game character. That said, not every law is breakable in this game; you still have to follow the laws of economics to make sure your park is fiscally responsible and financially stable.

Unlike more realistic theme park simulations, *Park Beyond* isn't always bound by the rules of gravity or physics.



5

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STORY OF SEASONS: A WONDERFUL LIFE

PUBLISHER XSEED / DEVELOPER MARVELOUS INC. / PLATFORMS XBOX SERIES X/S, PS5, SWITCH, PC / RELEASE DATE 06.27.2023

"Originally released on the GameCube and PlayStation 2, the farming simulation *A Wonderful Life* closely resembles other *Seasons* games, but offers something different. Though you can feel the passage of time to some extent in the other games, *A Wonderful Life* is the only one that allows you to fully enjoy life on a farm in your elder years. As for this remake, we took the idea of living a full life with several decades and strengthened the family angle with 70 new in-game cutscenes we hope will bring joy and fresh heartfelt memories. Character creation has also been overhauled to include skin color, hairstyle, and gender, so more players can feel a sense of immersion. We also focused on making the fun parts of the game more accessible by reducing load times, creating a bulletin board with requests from townsfolk to ease new players into the game's mechanics, and providing information for players to optimize their farming strategies."

RIKA HOSHINA, DIRECTOR, MARVELOUS INC.

"[W]e took the idea of living a full life with several decades and strengthened the family angle with 70 new in-game cutscenes we hope will bring joy and fresh heartfelt memories."

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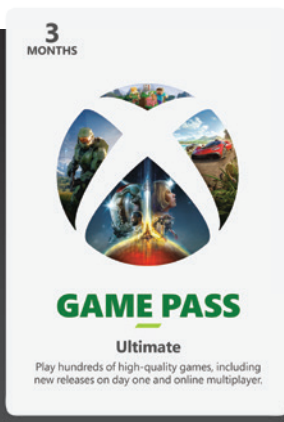


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* PREORDER

4



PIKMIN

POWER PLANTS



FACT FILE

PUBLISHER
NINTENDO
DEVELOPER
NINTENDO
PLATFORMS
SWITCH
RELEASE DATE
07.21.2023



“A key trait of the *Pikmin* series is exploring a familiar yet alien world from a pint-sized perspective.”

BILL TRINEN, NINTENDO TREEHOUSE

Nintendo, more than any other game maker, has an interesting relationship with genre. There are, of course, many popular genres that the Big N essentially invented as we know them today: 2D platformers, 3D platformers, action-adventure games, kart racers. But then there are other genres, ones Nintendo didn’t popularize—and that’s where things get particularly interesting.

When Nintendo jumps into an already-popular genre, you can be certain the company is going to put a fresh spin on established conventions, rather than just copying what’s worked in the past. *Super Smash Bros.* certainly isn’t your typical fighting game. *Splatoon* definitely isn’t your usual multiplayer shooter. And *Pikmin*, poised to get its fourth main chapter on the Nintendo Switch this summer, may fall under the broad banner of “real-time strategy,” but it’s hardly following in the footsteps of *StarCraft*, *Command & Conquer*, or *Age of Empires*.

In fact, *Pikmin* is so distinctive that, unless you’re already familiar with

■ The colorful Onions, as they’re known, are nests that can turn food and fallen foes into new Pikmin seeds.

the games, you’d probably benefit from a quick introduction. “A key trait of the *Pikmin* series is exploring a familiar yet alien world from a pint-sized perspective,” said Bill Trinen, Nintendo Treehouse. In all the games—*Pikmin 4* included—you play as a diminutive interstellar explorer on a planet inhabited by plant-like creatures called Pikmin, who you recruit to help you on your journey. You control your commander directly

in nature-inspired environments, issuing commands to the selflessly loyal Pikmin with an onscreen cursor and a toot from your explorer’s whistle.

“You can direct and throw Pikmin at obstacles, objects, and even enemies. Once assigned, Pikmin will then work as a group to pick up resources and objects or attack enemies, which they will then carry back to your base. The more Pikmin assigned to a task, the quicker a task



PIKMIN PRIMER

The Pikmin under your command come in different types, each with their own special abilities in combat and exploration. Bill Trinen, Nintendo Treehouse, confirmed that, alongside the new Ice Pikmin, all seven previous Pikmin types will be present and accounted for in *Pikmin 4*, with their familiar abilities intact. Here's what each variety brings to the (inch-high) table.

WINGED PIKMIN

The small and speedy Winged Pikmin are, predictably, the only variety that can fly. They can even carry objects through the air and follow your explorer into areas other Pikmin can't reach. While they're weak in combat, they can home in on a target when thrown, making them handy against fast-moving enemies.

YELLOW PIKMIN

Yellow Pikmin's abilities have changed throughout the series, so it's not clear which version will be in *Pikmin 4*, but something connected to electricity is a safe bet. In *Pikmin 2*, they were immune to electrical damage, and in *Pikmin 3*, they could link together to conduct electricity and power broken circuits.

RED PIKMIN

With their powerful attacking ability, Red Pikmin are always useful in combat or for quickly tearing down walls in your way. They're also entirely immune to fire, which makes them especially helpful against any fire-breathing enemies or fiery obstacles you may encounter.

BLUE PIKMIN

Most Pikmin will drown if they enter a body of water, but not Blue Pikmin. They can simply walk along the bottom, behaving exactly as they would on land. That makes them helpful for retrieving sunken objects or fighting aquatic enemies.

ICE PIKMIN

As you can probably guess, these newcomers are pretty chill. In combat, a swarm of Ice Pikmin can freeze an enemy they're attacking. But they're also helpful in exploration, as they can ice over the surface of water to allow your explorer to walk across.

WHITE PIKMIN

White Pikmin are poisonous to enemies but—at least in previous games in the series—that ability comes with a serious trade-off. They only release their poison to damage an enemy if that enemy eats them, and there's no coming back from that!

PURPLE PIKMIN

The Purple Pikmin are taller and heftier than the other varieties. That gives them strong attack power—helpful in combat—and it also enables them to lift 10 times more weight than the other Pikmin. But they're also the slowest of any Pikmin type, so don't expect quick results.

ROCK PIKMIN

The hard skin of Rock Pikmin makes them quite sturdy. They're immune to being crushed or stabbed by enemies or environmental hazards. They're also great at smashing through crystals, ice, or armor, and they do solid damage when thrown at enemies.



■ Your cursor directs Pikmin to specific locations, tasks to complete, or enemies to fight.

is completed,” Trinen explained. And the more resources you collect at your base, the more Pikmin you can add to your team, giving you even more minions to help accomplish your objectives.

Unlike in other RTS games, the main focus isn’t on construction or combat against an opposing army. While you do send your Pikmin into battle against hostile wildlife, your missions also emphasize overcoming obstacles in the environment, like building bridges to get across water or breaking down barriers in your way. Because the various colors of Pikmin have different special abilities

(see “Pikmin Primer”), there’s an element of creative puzzle solving required to make progress.

And don’t be surprised if you find yourself getting attached to your flower-headed followers, either. “Part of what makes this series so special is the surprising emotional bond you form with the curious Pikmin creatures,” Trinen said. “For example, you can decide whether to strategically care for your Pikmin and guide them safely from task to task, or you can simply send them rushing into danger, risking the loss of some of your Pikmin helpers. How you play is up to you, but your choices will

“How you play is up to you, but your choices will have a direct impact on your Pikmin companions.”

BILL TRINEN, NINTENDO TREEHOUSE

have a direct impact on your Pikmin companions.”

While all these core elements remain intact in *Pikmin 4*, Nintendo is also working hard to ensure that the series’ first entry in 10 years feels appropriately new through a variety of changes and additions.

For starters, you can expect to meet a new cast of explorers during *Pikmin 4*’s story. “You play a recent recruit to the Rescue Corps, which Captain Shepherd and Collin are a part of,” Trinen shared. “After they crash-land during their own rescue mission, you are tasked with finding them and the rest of the team. As you progress through the game, you’ll discover there are other explorers that may have also gotten lost on their own voyages to this mysterious planet.”

On the gameplay front, two of the biggest changes are the introduction





GET ALONG, LITTLE DOGGIE

It's hard to decide what the most exciting addition to *Pikmin 4* is, but if you're asking what the cutest new feature is, there's quite obviously only one correct, and very fuzzy, answer: Oatchi the Rescue Pup.

"Early on in the game, you are introduced to Oatchi, who serves as your adorable space pup companion throughout the game," explained Bill Trinen, Nintendo Treehouse. "Aside from just being a very good boy, Oatchi can jump up small ledges and traverse the landscape faster if you hop on his back. Eventually, you can also teach him new techniques to give you a leg up during your exploration and battles."

Part of the fun of *Pikmin 4* will be in discovering how Oatchi's abilities can be used in conjunction with the Pikmin to accomplish your objectives in new, different, and sometimes more efficient ways. "He complements what the Pikmin can do—he can carry them to navigate areas faster, he can break objects, he can help carry items, and more," Trinen said.



of a new Pikmin type—the Ice Pikmin—and a canine companion named Oatchi, both of which open up new options of overcoming obstacles and defeating enemies. (See sidebar "Get Along, Little Doggie" for more on Oatchi.)

But the update long-time *Pikmin* fans are most likely to notice first is the shift in perspective. Whereas previous games in the series had you looking down on the action from a high angle, the default camera in *Pikmin 4* sits lower to the ground, giving a more traditional third-person view.

"You are now able to play from a perspective that is closer to the

Pikmin's own view, down near the ground and closer to the action," Trinen said. "This allows you to focus on the tasks in front of you, and makes it simpler to maximize the efficiency of each task by using the combined talents of Pikmin and Oatchi the Rescue Pup." If you're not a fan of the closer camera, though, Trinen confirmed you can also switch back to the classic, zoomed-out view.

Another addition designed to make the game more accessible is a "Rewind Time" feature, which Trinen noted "will allow you to go back in time if you happen to lose many Pikmin or want to try something

■ Night Expeditions promise to mix up the standard *Pikmin* experience—though exactly how remains a mystery.

"You are now able to play from a perspective that is closer to the Pikmin's own view, down near the ground and closer to the action." BILL TRINEN, NINTENDO TREEHOUSE



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■ Treasures from the Pikmin planet's old world—quite possibly *our* world—are scattered for you to collect.

different.” Since you can rewind as many times as you want, there’s more freedom to experiment without having to worry about losing too many Pikmin and spoiling your chances of victory.

Of course, not every change in *Pikmin 4* is designed to make your journey easier. Nintendo has teased the introduction of “Night Expeditions” set after the sun goes down. While Trinen wanted to keep the particulars of these missions a surprise for players, it sure is ominous that in the brief footage we’ve seen, the darkness causes a Bulborb enemy’s eyes to start glowing red. In video games,

that’s not usually a sign things are about to get *less* challenging.

Pikmin 4 will also see the return of a feature that last appeared in *Pikmin 2*: caves. “As you explore above ground, you’ll come across cave entrances,” Trinen said. “Like *Pikmin 2*, time mostly comes to a halt when exploring caves, so you can take your time exploring these dark underground environments. As you might expect, the challenge grows the deeper you delve within a cave system.”

If you need a hand taking on *Pikmin 4*’s toughest expeditions—or

if you’re just looking to share the strategic fun with a friend or family member—you’re in luck. Like previous games in the series, *Pikmin 4* will also include multiplayer support of both the cooperative and competitive variety.

“Up to two players will be able to share the story adventure, where the second player will support the explorer that Player 1 controls. Additionally, there is a battle mode that allows two players to compete against each other to collect the most items within a time limit,” Trinen said.

Whether you’re an old hand at *Pikmin* who’s been waiting a decade for the next chapter of the series or a newcomer excited to see what’s so blooming special about it, one thing that’s immediately clear is that Nintendo has built *Pikmin 4* to be both deeper and more accessible than ever. Even after all this time, it turns out Nintendo’s novel twist on the real-time strategy genre can still, like the Pikmin themselves, grow in surprising ways.

“Regardless of your familiarity with the franchise,” Trinen said, “we hope you give the game a chance as you discover the might, curious nature, and adorable loyalty of the different Pikmin!” 🍄



“[T]he challenge grows the deeper you delve within a cave system.”

BILL TRINEN, NINTENDO TREEHOUSE

ATLAS FALLEN



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A promotional image for the video game RoboCop: Rogue City. It features a close-up of RoboCop's helmeted head and upper torso. He is wearing his iconic silver and black armor, which is highly detailed with various mechanical components and joints. The background is a dark, industrial setting with blurred lights, suggesting a city at night. The overall tone is gritty and futuristic.

preview

* PREORDER

ROBOCOP: ROGUE CITY

DEAD OR ALIVE, YOU'RE COMING WITH ME

FACT FILE

PUBLISHER

NACON

DEVELOPER

TEYON

PLATFORMS

XBOX SERIES X/S,

PS5, PC

RELEASE DATE

09.2023



Whether or not you agree that Paul Verhoeven's *RoboCop* is one of the best action movies of the 1980s—and it definitely is—you'd have a hard time arguing it's not one of the most idiosyncratic.

On one hand, it's an action movie, packed with shootouts and no shortage of violence. On the other hand, it's a biting satire of American consumerism and corporate greed, dripping with a retro-futuristic visual style all its own. On a third hand (look, maybe this is like an extra cyborg hand or something), it's a sometimes-philosophical exploration of what it

means to be human, imbued with a surprising amount of heart.

The sheer bottled-lightning weirdness of it all may be why it's been 20 years since we last saw Alex Murphy—the mild-mannered police officer killed in the line of duty and resurrected as RoboCop by the sinister megacorp Omni Consumer Products—in a starring role in a video game. (And the less said about that

2003 effort the better.) Recreating what makes *RoboCop* special is certainly no easy task.

With the upcoming *RoboCop: Rogue City*, however, developer Teyon is prepared to take on that challenge. "We are incredibly passionate about creating a game that truly captures the essence of the original *RoboCop* films," said game director Piotr Łatocha. "Our main goal is to

"We are incredibly passionate about creating a game that truly captures the essence of the original *RoboCop* films."

PIOTR ŁATOCHA, GAME DIRECTOR



THE WELLER MAN COME

As any *RoboCop* fan can tell you, so much of the cybernetic hero's appeal comes from the man under the shiny chrome helmet: actor Peter Weller, whose performances as Alex Murphy (both pre- and post-*RoboCop*ification) transformed the character from a cool design into an action movie icon.

It's great news, then, that Teyon was able to recruit Weller, now 75, to reprise his role in *RoboCop: Rogue City*. "It was definitely an unforgettable experience working with Peter Weller," said game director Piotr Łatocha. "Hearing him bring the legendary Alex Murphy back to life was truly incredible. What really amazed me was how easily Peter slipped into character and embodied the hero's essence, nailing the tone and cadence of his speech from the very first line."

In fact, Łatocha said, Weller's impact on the game went beyond his performance. "He even gave us some valuable feedback on how *RoboCop* would react in certain situations, which we incorporated into the script."



fully immerse players into the gritty, corrupted world of *RoboCop*, making them feel like they are walking the streets as the iconic hero himself."

Lest you think the team is focused on the action at the expense of everything else that made *RoboCop* such a memorable film, Łatocha also cited recreating the "intense, heavy, and satirical tone" of Paul Verhoeven's original 1987 movie as a major priority.

In terms of genre, *Rogue City* is a first-person shooter, but Teyon isn't forgetting that there's more to Alex Murphy than blasting bad guys. You'll also spend some time doing actual

police work and exploring environments that go well beyond a simple shooting gallery.

"While shooting is certainly an important aspect of our game, we've also put a lot of focus on creating a rich storyline, encouraging exploration and investigation," said Łatocha. "In some levels, players have the option to choose which objectives to pursue, some of which involve action-packed gunfights, while others center on investigations or interactions with side characters."

Rather than trying to directly adapt the events of the films, Teyon has

■ Something tells us you're going to need more than just your Auto-9 to take out an ED walker.



“Working closely with MGM, we have made every effort to ensure that our game is fully complementary into the franchise’s lore.”

PIOTR ŁATOCHA, GAME DIRECTOR

instead opted to tell a new story that slots into the existing canon, taking place between the events of *RoboCop 2* and *RoboCop 3*. “Working closely with MGM, we have made every effort to ensure that our game is fully complementary into the franchise’s lore,” Łatocha noted.

Still, while the story is new, the team also made certain to include plenty of sights, sounds, and faces that will be familiar to fans. As *RoboCop*, you’ll be able to explore environments lifted directly from the movies, which Teyon recreated in detail by studying both footage of the





“[W]e’ve included around 20 different weapons for players to discover and choose from.”

PIOTR ŁATOCHA, GAME DIRECTOR

combat. So far, Teyon has revealed a slow-motion mode that lets you bring time to a crawl to get the advantage in a firefight.

“In addition to slow motion, there are a variety of other active and passive skills available for players to choose from. These upgrades offer a range of options for players to customize their gameplay experience to their liking,” Łatocha revealed. You’ll also be able to upgrade certain abilities as you progress in the game, allowing you to, for example, extend the amount of time you can spend in slow-motion. Ultimately, Łatocha said the designers wanted to ensure that players will feel like “the unstoppable force that is RoboCop.”

If *RoboCop: Rogue City* can pull it off, if Teyon can recreate the special mix of what made the 1987 film a classic, *and* deliver a game that’s fun to play? Let’s just say we’d buy that for way more than a dollar. ©

scenes and the real-world locations where they were filmed. You’ll also battle against established enemies like the bipedal OCP Enforcement Droid. And, of course, you’ll be able to wield RoboCop’s signature gun, the Auto-9—you know, the pistol he keeps holstered in that nifty little leg compartment.

According to Łatocha, the Auto-9 is *Rogue City*’s “main weapon,” and you’ll be able to improve its performance throughout the game by discovering OCP-manufactured upgrades. But the Auto-9 won’t be the only firepower in your arsenal.

“We wanted to give players the freedom to experiment and explore different options. That’s why we’ve included around 20 different weapons for players to discover and choose from,” Łatocha said. “Some of the weapons dropped by enemies may prove to be more powerful than the Auto-9 before it is upgraded. Ultimately, the choice of which weapon to use is up to the player and their preferred playstyle.”

In addition to weapons, *Rogue City*’s RoboCop will also have access to special cybernetic abilities that enhance his effectiveness in

■ It doesn’t matter how much of a dystopian nightmare Detroit has become—you still have to pay attention to the posted parking signs.



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BALDUR'S GATE 3

REOPENING THE GATE

FACT FILE

PUBLISHER
LARIAN STUDIOS
DEVELOPER
LARIAN STUDIOS
PLATFORMS
PS5, PC
RELEASE DATE
08.31.2023



While being a fan of a long-dormant video game franchise can be tough at times, it's important to remember: In our hobby, nothing is ever truly dead.

Take, for example, the fabled RPG series *Baldur's Gate*. The original game launched way back in 1998, captivating fans with its mix of *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* rule-sets and original gameplay. It would see a sequel in 2000's *Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn*, an expansion one year later, and then nothing but spin-offs or enhanced editions for the next 20-plus years.

This August, however, will see a day that many thought would never come: the official and full release of *Baldur's Gate III*.

The franchise is now in the hands of Larian Studios, whose work on its own *Divinity: Original Sin* titles helped land it the chance to bring *Baldur's Gate* back. Even with that pedigree, the team is very clear on the challenge of making a modern game that still honors its forebears, according to director of publishing Michael Douse.

"There were a lot of battles we had to navigate. We had to pick

Look, we don't know *exactly* what's happening in this screenshot, but we do know it makes us want to play *Baldur's Gate III* even more.

which fights to fight, which to avoid, and which to try and reach common ground on," he explained. "In some ways, we made our jobs harder, but we knew that by taking the easy way out of certain discussions and situations, it would reduce the payoff at launch."

One fight the team chose to engage in is, well, fights. *Baldur's Gate III* shifts battles to a new turn-based system, a departure from the real-time strategy nature of previous games.

Another decision the developer stood by was avoiding the allure of relying too heavily on storylines or characters from the older games—although a familiar face or two, such as fan-favorite Minsc, will play some part in the adventure.

"There were a lot of battles we had to navigate. We had to pick which fights to fight, which to avoid, and which to try and reach common ground on."

MICHAEL DOUSE, LARIAN STUDIOS
DIRECTOR OF PUBLISHING



THE POWER OF THE PEOPLE

While *Baldur's Gate III* officially launches in August 2023, the game has actually been out in early access since October 2020. One of the benefits to giving players the chance to test out a portion of your new gaming project early is that the feedback from those players can make for a far better experience once the full game launches. To get an idea of what's changed over these past few years, we spoke to *Baldur's Gate III*'s director of publishing Michael Douse.

"Those with a good memory might remember their party members being quite aggressive with them, or difficult to make friends with. We toned that down," Douse gave us as an example. "We also introduced 'Loaded Dice' as an option for players who don't want to have a strict RNG [randomized] experience. Loaded dice basically notices you're failing a lot of rolls, and skews rolls to your favor dynamically."

On another level, Douse explained that there was a lot of "more mundane" feedback that came in over the course of early access through telemetry data—details like which races were most popular, which Origin Characters players recruited the most, how best to distribute loot, or where players were most often dying or least often exploring.

"[That data] helps you start polishing things a lot earlier than you would otherwise," Douse said. "You wouldn't throw kids onto a roller coaster without making sure it all does what the planning and math said it would first."

■ It wouldn't be a game based on *Dungeons & Dragons* without some big ol' dragons.

Instead, Larian has built *Baldur's Gate III* upon a new roster of characters in some rather interesting ways. One such option is Origin Characters, a predetermined cast of heroes that you can choose to play as instead of going the fully customized character route. Anybody that you don't pick will then show up as a part of your adventure through the game.

"You can play through as each of them, each with their own storylines. You can choose to recruit them, or not," said Douse. "You can romance them, or not. You can betray them, or remain loyal. You can even kill them if you want. The game and the story will react to who you are, how you play, and indeed who you have in your party."





Oh, and by the way—if you think you’re just going to do whatever you want and always get away with it, Douse told us that things might not go as planned. Depending on how you treat them, your companions might approve or disapprove of your actions, fall in love with you, get in the way of your goals, or even straight up leave your party.

“[The Origin Characters can leave] you with very human considerations to make as you play,” Douse added. “This level of depth-of-character is quite rare in games these days, but it’s what *Dungeons & Dragons* is about.”

Indeed, *Baldur’s Gate III* is without question a game steeped in many aspects and traditions of the nearly 50-year-old tabletop role-playing

game. And yet, that shouldn’t cause those unfamiliar with the pen-and-paper experience to shy away from playing. No matter if you’re a long-time *D&D* player, a fan of the *Baldur’s Gate* series, or just someone who appreciates interesting video games, *Baldur’s Gate III* will have something to offer you—for one very simple reason.

“We’re making a game where a group of friends, or someone playing with an AI party, can sit around, take part, and tell a story together,” explained Douse. “It doesn’t really matter [what kind of player you are], because people have been sitting around fireplaces sharing stories for as long as anyone had even the concept of a memory. It is perhaps the oldest communal activity there is.”

“The game and the story will react to who you are, how you play, and indeed who you have in your party.”

MICHAEL DOUSE, LARIAN STUDIOS
DIRECTOR OF PUBLISHING



preview

* PREORDER

ATLAS FALLEN

THE SANDS OF FREEDOM

FACT FILE

PUBLISHER

FOCUS

ENTERTAINMENT

DEVELOPER

DECK13

PLATFORMS

XBOX SERIES X/S,

PS5, PC

RELEASE DATE

08.10.2023

“We want to evolve as a studio and look into the future, picking new core elements for every game we make.”

JAN KLOSE, CREATIVE DIRECTOR AND OVERALL MANAGING DIRECTOR

Between the looming peaks of big-budget triple-A releases, and the endless ocean of indie titles crafted by smaller studios, one of the travelers of the sprawling middle ground of video games is German developer Deck13. In recent years, the studio has gained notoriety thanks to titles such as the heavily *Dark Souls*-inspired *Lords of the Fallen* and the more sci-fi—yet still very Soulslike—series *The Surge*.

Given the nature of those past projects, it might be easy to expect a similar experience from Deck13's latest work, *Atlas Fallen*. According to the game's creative director and overall managing director Jan Klose, however, that would be a mistake.

“We want to evolve as a studio and look into the future, picking new core elements for every game we make,” Klose told us. “This time, the fast-paced combat was something that we felt very intrigued by, so we chose to build new features around that to make something new.”

Part of that “something new” is the world of *Atlas Fallen* itself. As opposed to the more strictly defined and guided areas of previous games, *Atlas Fallen* better resembles an open sandbox—in part because, well, the land is covered by a vast desert.

“We have our own very unique world with lore that's literally buried there, in the sand, in the devastated rock formations, in old towns and villages,” Klose explained. “These are new locations hidden across the many regions of our semi-open world that can't be found like this in the other games.”

Klose added that, in opening up more of *Atlas Fallen*'s world, the team also wanted to expand other elements of choice and gameplay freedom to players as well. This, of course, made it harder to predict what those players will do and when. Klose and the team took that as a challenge to find the right balance between “guiding the players and having them figure things out by themselves.”



■ *Atlas Fallen* will let you fully customize your hero's appearance and gender.

Another interesting element of balance comes in the game's combat systems. As opposed to the slower, more tactical battles of the studio's previous few games, *Atlas Fallen* features more dynamic, faster-paced, and flashier combat. What will feel familiar to fans, however, is the ability to target specific body parts of your enemies when attacking them, something Klose called “part of the Deck13 DNA.”

Built deep into all of that is the Momentum system. Using a special



MIXED-UP MELEE



In many action RPGs, gaining new and more powerful weapons often comes from collecting them from defeated enemies, finding them in hidden treasure chests, or buying them from a local merchant. In *Atlas Fallen*, however, warriors craft their armaments from the very ground the player walks upon.

That all comes thanks to the Gauntlet, a divine item found early in the adventure. According to Deck13 managing director and *Atlas Fallen* creative director Jan Klose, the Gauntlet can transform sand into “solid, magical items,” and those weapons “can change their shape in an instant.”

“Your sword can become a whip, or your axe can deal a powerful hammer blow,” Klose explained. “And, you can switch between your weapon types even mid-combo.”

Crafting weapons from sand might seem like a strange way to go about things, but there’s a simple reason for that: Sand is not only the most abundant resource in the lands of Atlas, but also one of the few that remains usable. With the world in ruins thanks to both wars and over-mining, the oppressed inhabitants of Atlas have little left to use in their fight for freedom. Ironically, thanks to the incredible powers of the Gauntlet, the sand that helped thrust Atlas into such a sorry state may now be the key to mankind’s survival.

■ Get ready to throw down the Gauntlet against the massive beasts lurking beneath the sands.

weapon that’s found early in the game, players can launch powerful attacks that charge up a Momentum bar. As the bar’s energy increases, players can do more damage, utilize additional skills, and transform their weapons into deadlier armaments (see sidebar “Mixed-up Melee”). However, here’s where the importance of balance comes in, as the more energized a player’s Momentum bar is, the weaker their defense becomes. Engaging in *Atlas Fallen*’s combat will constantly be a question of which is more important at any given moment: higher offensive

capabilities or better protection against taking damage.

Of course, finding that balance just leads us back once again to Deck13’s determination to craft a new project that creates a world of possibilities, and then lets players loose within it to find their own way forward.

“If you enjoy these types of games, you should give *Atlas Fallen* a try,” said Klose. “Discover the many secrets and dangers we’ve hid there for you, and try out our unique ways of traversal, discovery, and combat.”



“Discover the many secrets and dangers we’ve hid there for you, and try out our unique ways of traversal, discovery, and combat.”

JAN KLOSE, CREATIVE DIRECTOR AND OVERALL MANAGING DIRECTOR

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GAME OF THE MONTH

STAR WARS JEDI: SURVIVOR

TOUR DE FORCE

Four years ago, on consoles one generation away, Respawn Entertainment and EA released one of the best *Star Wars* games in recent memory. Not only did *Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order* nail the vibe of George Lucas's sprawling space opera universe, tell a compelling story as a part of the official franchise canon, and deliver a memorable hero in Paddaawn-turned-fugitive Cal Kestis, it also nailed the scope and polish of a modern, big-budget action game.

Now, Cal's back in *Star Wars Jedi: Survivor*. Like its predecessor, the sequel blends familiar elements from other action games into something that feels distinct, borrowing the best ideas and mechanics from beloved series like *Dark Souls*, *Metroid*, and even Respawn's own *Titanfall*, using them to fashion something new.

The game picks up five years after the events of the first game, with Cal now a full-fledged Jedi fighting against the evil Galactic Empire. Without venturing too deep into spoiler territory, we'll just say that quite a few familiar faces return,

alongside new friends and foes and a handful of excellent cameos. Intriguingly, *Jedi: Survivor* also ties in heavily to a new era in the canon that Disney is exploring: the High Republic, which existed for a few centuries before the events of *Episode I*.

FACT FILE

PUBLISHER

EA

DEVELOPER

RESPAWN

PLATFORMS

XBOX SERIES X/S,

PS5, PC

RELEASE DATE

04.28.2023





In terms of gameplay, one of the most compelling aspects of *Jedi: Survivor* is that Cal keeps the abilities he unlocked over the course of the last game—no Samus-gets-EMP-blasted-and-loses-everything moment here. Instead, Respawn has layered additional Force abilities on top of Cal's previously gained powers. One highlight? He can now use the Jedi mind trick to tame animals and compel bad guys to (temporarily) fight on his side.

Cal also gains access to five different lightsaber stances, including

one that lets him use a blaster, and another that lights up a crossguard on his saber (reminiscent of Kylo Ren's) and makes it feel like a heavy broadsword. The sheer variety of tactics at your disposal by the end of the adventure are impressive. If you wanted to, you could practically fight every single battle a different way.

If there's anywhere that *Jedi: Survivor* comes up short, it's only in comparison with its predecessor. While some of the planets Cal explores in the new game are much, much bigger than anything in *Jedi:*

■ The planet Koboh holds secrets from throughout the *Star Wars* timeline.

One of the most compelling aspects of *Jedi: Survivor* is that Cal keeps the abilities he unlocked over the course of the last game

Fallen Order, there are slightly fewer overall, so you spend a lot more time heading back to worlds you've already visited. The story also feels a touch less impactful—though it's still packed with exhilarating moments.

Still, in every other aspect, *Star Wars Jedi: Survivor* outshines the first game. With any luck, the series will continue—and continue to get even better. The Force is strong with this one. [G](#)




 BUY NOW


 86
100

ADVANCE WARS 1+2: RE-BOOT CAMP

AN ORANGE STAR IS REBORN

If we were to ask you to name some genres that Nintendo excels at, you'd no doubt offer up examples such as platformers, party games, action adventures, kart racers, or maybe even fighting games. One genre that might not instantly come to mind, though, is strategy games. And yet, over the years, the publisher has worked closely with teams like Intelligent Systems to produce a long line of titles that favor smart tactics and strategic map movements over sword swings or well-timed jumps.

In *Advance Wars 1+2: Re-Boot Camp*, Nintendo revives two of Intelligent Systems' earlier strategy games with the help of outside studio WayForward. We haven't had a new release in the franchise since 2008's *Advance Wars: Days of Ruin*, so *Re-Boot Camp* is a welcome addition to

the Switch's library. We're definitely fans of the *Fire Emblem* series, but with how complex and story-heavy those games have become, it's nice to return to the simpler, more combat-focused experiences of the first two *Advance Wars* releases.

Don't take that to mean that you won't find a lot of gameplay depth or fun characters here, however. Although *Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising* is the more fleshed-out and story-rich part of the package, both games offer a huge amount of combat scenarios where you'll need to balance well-planned at-

tack formations, the strengths and weaknesses of your units, the special abilities of your (and your enemies') commanding officer, and a bit of good old-fashioned luck.

The gameplay of each of the original *Advance Wars* games holds up incredibly well here, but now comes bolstered by a graphical overhaul that really enhances the experience. Between the rich animations of each story's casts and the overall visual style that resembles toys traversing a tabletop game board, the franchise's trademark wars have never looked better.

FACT FILE

PUBLISHER
NINTENDO
DEVELOPER
WAYFORWARD
PLATFORMS
SWITCH
RELEASE DATE
04.21.2023

The gameplay of each of the original *Advance Wars* games holds up incredibly well here, but now comes bolstered by a graphical overhaul that really enhances the experience.



■ Your units may look like children's toys, but they all pack a mean punch.

When not working to take down the dual campaigns, you can unlock additional battle maps, COs, or music, take on the CPU in specific War Room challenges, design and share your own custom maps, or face off against friends in either local or online play.

That last part brings about one of our few notable complaints about *Re-Boot Camp*. While local multiplayer offers up to four players the ability to compete either via one shared Switch or multi-system play, online battles are limited to 1-vs.-1 fights—



and only with people already on your friends list. As well, along with the various quality of life improvements brought to both games, we'd really love to see the ability to undo a move should players make a simple mistake, rather than having to use the option to reset that entire turn.

Still, despite a few questionable design choices and missed opportunities, *Advance Wars 1+2: Re-Boot Camp* is a top-notch revival of two equally enjoyable games that deserve to be played by a whole new generation of fans—or replayed by those of us who went into battle the first time around. [G](#)



1 ON 1

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: GOLLUM

HARALD RIEGLER

PRODUCER DAEDALIC ENTERTAINMENT

J.R.R. Tolkien's seminal fantasy series *The Lord of the Rings* has a long history in video games, dating all the way back to a 1982 text adventure based on *The Hobbit*. But across dozens of interactive adaptations, no one ever thought to build a game around one of Middle-earth's most iconic figures: the slinking, two-faced, ring-corrupted Gollum. That changed when Daedalic Entertainment set out on an epic quest to build the stealthy action-adventure title *The Lord of the Rings: Gollum*. To find out more, we ventured into a dark cave in the depths of the Misty Mountains and asked producer Harald Riegler a few riddles—well, questions—of our own.

WGC: What was it like to craft a game around such a unique main character?

Harald Riegler: With over 400 years on his back, Gollum is a long-lived creature, but he is far from weak. He is very agile, astute, and always vigilant. Designing a game around a character with such a distinctive physique and movement was definitely an exciting challenge. It meant that our developers had to put a lot of effort into creating gameplay mechanics that suited Gollum's traits.

[For example], our level designers made sure that all environments offered a lot of verticality on the one side, and many dark corners and hiding spaces on the other. That way the player can always find

advantageous spots that fit their individual playstyles. And, we haven't even talked about the split personality of Gollum and Sméagol!

WGC: Can you tell us more about that split-personality aspect?

HR: From early on, we knew that we had to create a game that delved deeper into Gollum's distorted mind, since modern players not only want to know what a character does but also where their motivation stems from.

We all remember scenes from the movies where Gollum and Sméagol are fighting with each other. We made sure that in *The Lord of the Rings: Gollum*,

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS: BATTLE FOR BIKINI BOTTOM, THE GUILD 3

players get deeply immersed in these inner conflicts. Whenever Gollum and Sméagol start fighting about something, the player must choose a side, and live with the consequences of this decision. They not only have an impact on Gollum's behavior, but also on his psyche, as the personality that the players sides with will become stronger and more dominant in the future.

It was important to us that these inner conflicts are not just superficial gimmicks, but a key gameplay element that leads to difficult moral choices and character growth.

WGC: The game follows Gollum through a chapter J.R.R. Tolkien mentioned but never explored in detail. How did you craft a new story that can fit into the existing canon?

HR: Coming up with a story that pays respect to the original material while also telling something new was certainly challenging, especially with a main character whose fate has already been sealed at Mount Doom. We hired a small team of *Lord of the Rings* lore experts who supervised the entire production process, and they analyzed every piece of information professor Tolkien [had written] about Gollum. They then interpreted all of these findings to create a story and visual identity for the game that stays as true to professor Tolkien's vision as no video game adaptation has done in the past.

With these experts we were able to unfold a previously untold story that shows Gollum as what he really is: A tragic and tormented soul, a lonely outcast and, somewhere deep inside of him, a hobbit that has been corrupted by the power of the One Ring.

WGC: If you had to pick one *Lord of the Rings* character to escort you through Mordor, who would you pick and why?

HR: I think I'd love to wander through Mordor with Samwise Gamgee. I'm Austrian, and we love potatoes in all forms and sizes. I'm certain that I could ramble about potatoes all day with Sam! French fries, potato salad, potato pancakes, baked potatoes, so much stuff to discuss. With a gourmet like Sam at your side, you'll forget the burning heat of Mordor, I'm sure! 🍌

With over 400 years on his back, Gollum is a long-lived creature, but he is far from weak.



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